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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001931

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: YAR'ADUA'S FIRST 100 DAYS - AN ASSESSMENT

REF: A. LAGOS 609
[¶B.](#) ABUJA 1876
[¶C.](#) LAGOS 602
[¶D.](#) ABUJA 1865
[¶E.](#) ABUJA 1855
[¶F.](#) ABUJA 1779
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[¶K.](#) LAGOS 514
[¶L.](#) ABUJA 1535
[¶M.](#) ABUJA 1507
[¶N.](#) 06 ABUJA 3227

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Robert Gribbin for reasons 1.4. (b & d)
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[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY. As President Yar'Adua's first 100 days in office draw to a close, his slow start organizing his government has substantively hampered his ability to formulate new policy. As a result, his record of accomplishments is thin, and the question of whether he is up to the task he faces remains unanswered. That said, Yar'Adua's public statements are sending many of the right messages -- focusing on continued economic reform, strengthening rule of law, addressing Niger Delta security and development, and rooting out corruption. However, without specific detail, these remain only words (and ones previously employed to little effect by former President Obasanjo), and Yar'Adua's ability to formulate and implement his own policy direction remains unproven. To date, Yar'Adua's focus has been more on dismantling some of Obasanjo policies than formulating new ones of his own; the administration's plans (promised in the near future) for Delta development and security may offer the first glimpse of Yar'Adua's own agenda. The President has made some progress in loosening Obasanjo's hold on the government's policy-making machinery, and Obasanjo does not appear to be playing the behind-the-scenes puppetmaster role many had feared. Yar'Adua (or at the very least his close advisors) may, in fact, be much more politically savvy than many had initially judged. His establishment of a unity government and attempts at reconciliation with disenfranchised segments of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) have further weakened the political opposition, and may eventually create his own base of support within the party. In addition, he has been relatively successful at reading public sentiment

and has rarely drawn public criticism for his decisions. END SUMMARY.

TALKING THE TALK

12. (C) After taking office on May 29, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua got off to a slow start, earning him the local nickname "Baba Go Slow," a reference to Nigeria's infamous traffic jams known as "go slows." With a majority of the cabinet not sworn in until almost two months after his own inauguration (and some Ministerial positions still unfilled), the government policy-making machinery was stalled for much of the first 100 days. Yar'Adua's energy in these first months appears to have been focused on identifying whom to trust, and on whom among the old guard to retain in the government. While he has continued to say the right things about the rule of law, corruption, economic reform, electoral reform and Niger Delta security, he has taken few actions to define policy directions from the new administration.

13. (C) The two areas where the administration's rhetoric has been predominantly focused are security and development in the Niger Delta, and the fight against corruption. Yar'Adua's newly formed Delta committee (with Vice President Goodluck Jonathan as its Chair) is different from the many previous committees on the subject in that it immediately sought to engage the militants in discussion, with Jonathan personally meeting with several militant leaders. Yar'Adua's release of imprisoned militant leader Dakubo Asari is seen by many as an overture to the militants to be engaged in the process. This appears to be a new approach to the region; but we are yet to see whether this will translate into concrete policy recommendations and actions. (NOTE: FornMin

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called a meeting of the diplomatic corps on September 5 to unveil the administration's Delta plan. Details will be provided septel. END NOTE)

14. (C) The new administration has also increased its public statements, and occasionally its actions, on fighting corruption and upholding the rule of law. For the first time, several former governors were interrogated, arrested and charged with malfeasance and corruption. Yar'Adua has made numerous statements (and admonitions to his own administration) that no one will be above the law and that all agencies must adhere to the law. His quick insistence that the court decisions removing Andy Uba from the Anambra Governor's House and reinstating former Supreme Court Justice Salong after the high court overturned his dismissal were a definite departure from the previous administration. Mission officers have noted in multiple meetings with officials ranging from the FornMin to EFCC Chair Ribadu that the words "rule of law" have become part of the standard talking points.

DE-CONSTRUCTING AND DISENTANGLING FROM OBASANJO

15. (C) Despite the new approach to the Delta and strong anti-corruption messages, however, much of Yar'Adua's energy since taking office has been focused on reversing or deconstructing some of Obasanjo's more negatively-received policies and on removing some Obasanjo loyalists from power. Starting with the settlement of the June 20-23 national strike through agreement to cancel the VAT increase, reduce the fuel increase (and agree to no increases for one year), review (and later cancel) the refinery sales, and implement a promised civil service pay raise, Yar'Adua has plodded a steady course of undoing some of Obasanjo's less popular policies. Yar'Adua also ended a three-month teachers' strike by reinstating 49 lecturers retrenched by Obasanjo and recalled and reinstated more than 2,000 federal workers alleged to have been wrongfully dismissed by the previous administration. These included, most notably, former Ministry of Labor Permanent Secretary Dr. Karipamo-Agary and former Ministry of Transport Permanent Secretary S.D. Mantakari. (NOTE: These two have been reinstated, but not

yet reassigned portfolios. END NOTE) In August, Yar'Adua announced the cancellation of some of Obasanjo's final contract awards, in particular the national contract for primary health centers in all 774 local government areas. He also put an end to the practice of granting tax and tariff waivers and directed an investigation into all existing waivers. His administration reversed Obasanjo's educational reform package that had equated university and polytechnical degrees and ceased GON funding to federal universities.

¶6. (C) Yar'Adua has also moved to limit Obasanjo's influence within the GON. In the petroleum industry, Yar'Adua removed the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Group Managing Director Funsho Kupolokan (an Obasanjo appointee) and replaced him with fellow Katsina-native Abubakar Lawal Yar'Adua (no relation). (NOTE: Soon after Kupolokan was removed, President Yar'Adua announced the break-up of the NNPC, which Kupolokan had opposed. END NOTE) Obasanjo-appointed Chief of the State Security Services Kayode Are was also replaced with a Northerner. In late August, Yar'Adua took Central Bank Chair Soludo and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chair Ribadu off the Economic Management Team, thereby removing the last two Obasanjo appointees from that body.

¶7. (C) Many observers believe the Presidency is at least involved in several other recent actions to limit or roll back Obasanjo's influence. The Senate's decision not to confirm Obasanjo loyalist Bode Augusto for a Ministerial appointment was allegedly based on a quiet hint from Yar'Adua. The President's office is also carefully keeping out of the contracting scandal surrounding House of Representatives Speaker Patricia Etteh, perhaps hoping it will result in her removal from that office. Given that the tribunal investigating Senate President David Mark's (highly dubious) election is being presided over by a judge widely believed to be incorruptible, some speculate Yar'Adua is hoping that simply allowing the investigative process to run its course may be enough to remove these two Obasanjo loyalists from the leadership of both Houses of the National

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Assembly. Should they lose their positions, or simply be significantly weakened, Obasanjo's influence on the Assembly would likely be greatly reduced.

¶8. (C) Interestingly, and contrary to earlier speculation, we have heard no reports of Yar'Adua consulting with the PDP hierarchy before deciding any of these policy reversals and personnel changes. Obasanjo amended the PDP constitution last December virtually to require his election as Chairman of the party's Board of Trustees, and also to require the new President to consult with the board on any new policies. Yar'Adua has apparently simply been ignoring this.

YAR'ADUA - MORE SAVVY THAN INITIALLY THOUGHT?

¶9. (C) Yar'Adua has shown a level of political savvy well above what many expected of him -- or, at the very least, his advisors have proven adept at playing the political game. A Guardian newspaper poll on Yar'Adua's first 100 days found 79 percent of Nigerians (spread across all geo-political zones) are satisfied with the administration's performance, with a majority attributing their satisfaction to Yar'Adua's responsiveness and transparency. The new administration has succeeded at reading public sentiment and has only made two missteps which drew public ire. The first was Yar'Adua's support of the Attorney General's move to reign in the EFCC; when this drew heavy criticism, however, he quickly changed course and assured the Nigerian public there would be no change in the EFCC's mandate. The second was the selection as Chair of the new electoral reform panel of former Chief Justice Muhammed Lawal Uwais, who is widely criticized for having rubber-stamped the badly flawed 2003 elections. While other members of the panel have been viewed as generally acceptable, press and opposition spokesmen have been strongly

against Uwais' chairmanship.

¶10. (C) Yar'Adua has also managed to weaken the political opposition, in particular those who have appealed against the election results, and begun to establish his own support base within the PDP. The President used the offer of Ministerial office to entice some of the more opportunist leaders of several opposition parties into joining a Government of National Unity. As a result of pressures on the main opposition ANPP from such would-be Ministers and their allies, the party appears poised to drop its petition before the electoral tribunal contending the Presidential election results. The AC, the second largest opposition party, has seen a split in its top ranks, with its National Secretary decamping. Observers view the establishment of a PDP reconciliation team headed by Alex Ekwueme (a critic of Obasanjo) as intended to offer an olive branch to former party members driven out of the party by the former President. If such efforts succeed, these returning party members could help strengthen Yar'Adua's own support base within the party.

COMMENT: CAN HE WALK THE WALK?

¶11. (C) Comment. While he had some accomplishments, we are concerned that, at the 100-day mark, we have yet to see President Yar'Adua actively define any significant policies of his own. Having come to power through elections widely dismissed as rigged, Yar'Adua may think he lacks the legitimacy to put forward his own agenda. Such a belief, coupled with his cautious, introspective nature, could easily become a formula for inaction. In fairness to him, the need to weaken Obasanjo's influence within the GON has absorbed a considerable amount of his time and effort, and the constitutionally mandated requirements for regional inclusiveness (e.g., the provision requiring at least one cabinet minister from each of the 36 states) make the process of organizing any government in Nigeria exceedingly complex. Whatever the cause, the first one hundred days of Yar'Adua's government has simply not been enough to reveal whether he will be up to the challenges he is facing. End comment.
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